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ABSTRACT

This study explored the attitudes and beliefs of Spanish regular classroom teachers toward inclusion. The "Inclusion Attitudes and Beliefs" survey instrument was administered to 100 preservice and inservice regular classroom teachers enrolled in a postgraduate program before taking a special education course. Results indicated that the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion could be classified as either: (1) acceptance of primary responsibility for included students and the positive effects of inclusion, particularly in the social domain; or (2) strong reservations about work load, skills necessary to teach diverse students, and fear of eliminating the continuum of placements. No statistically significant differences were found between Spanish preservice and inservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes. The paper concludes that continuous teacher education focused on perceptions and attitudes is needed to enable teachers to work effectively with special needs students. The survey, with teacher responses for each question, is attached. (Contains 15 references.) (DB)

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What Do Spanish General Education Preservice and Inservice Teachers Believe Toward Inclusion?

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to explore, analyze, and compare Spanish regular classroom teachers beliefs toward inclusion. The "Inclusion Attitudes and Beliefs" survey instrument was administered to a sample of 100 preservice and inservice regular classroom teachers enrolled in a postgraduate program before taking a special education course. The instrument included 30 statements to which respondents reacted on a five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Results indicated that Spanish regular classroom teachers' beliefs toward inclusion divided into two major areas: (1) acceptance of primary responsibility for included students, and the positive effects of inclusion, particularly, on the social domain, and (2) strong reservations about work load, skills necessary to teach diverse students, and fear of eliminating the continuum of placements. No significant statistically differences were found between Spanish preservice and inservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes to teach diverse students in inclusive settings. Continuous teacher education focused on perceptions and attitudes that enable teachers to work effectively with special needs students should be provided.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion means the education of all students, both with and without disabilities, in elementary or secondary regular classrooms and schools (Andrews, & Clementson, 1997). However, in order for inclusion to be effective, general classroom teachers have to be sensitive to its principles and demands.

The Spanish educational policy (LISMI, 1982; LOGSE, 1990; Real Decreto 696/1995) clearly advocates for the inclusion of all children in general education classrooms with appropriate assistance. Nevertheless, inquiry about Spanish teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward inclusion reveals (Balbás, 1998; García, & Alonso, 1985) not only a scarcity of research but also a need to systematically explore and analyze teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of all students into the regular classrooms.

In Spain, like in other developed countries, general education teachers have not reacted favorably to the demands of inclusion (Aguilera et al., 1990). A major criticism of the inclusion movement in this country is that inclusion has been imposed by law rather than after a process of consultation and preparation, and consequently, without taking into account teachers' reactions.

Most of the available information about teacher' beliefs and attitudes toward inclusion comes from the United States (Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996; Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1996). This research supports the warning of critics that regular classroom teachers are likely to resist the placement of children with disabilities into the regular classroom because of lack of skills (Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, & Lesar, 1991), perceived competence or self-efficay (Soodak, & Podell, 1993), judgment that instructional adaptations are unfeasible (Schumm, & Vaughn, 1991; Scott, Vitale, & Masten, 1998), or lack of supports and collaboration (Wolery, Werts, Caldwell, Snyder, & Lissowski, 1995). In such a context, relatively little is known about Spanish teachers' views and perceptions regarding inclusion. If as we know, beliefs influence

how teachers think, teach, react to change, and learn to teach, before we continue implementing inclusive programs, we need to explore the interplay of such as variables on teacher thinking.

Little has been done to determine whether or not Spanish teachers' beliefs differ according to experience with schooling. Preservice and inservice teachers may think differentially about inclusion and, consequently, may perceive different training needs. Thus, two questions guided this study:

1. What do Spanish regular classroom teachers believe toward inclusion?.
2. Do Spanish teachers' beliefs (benefits and concerns toward inclusion) differ as a function of school experience?.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were certified regular education teachers enrolled in a postgraduate teacher university program and registered in a required special education course. The total number of respondents completing the survey was 82 (71%). Teachers included in the study came from urban, suburban, and rural areas around the province of Alicante, Spain, and were ethnically homogeneous. Additional demographic information includes the following. The sample was 78% female and 22% male. Ages ranged from 21 to 59 years old (average = 30.84, SD = 9.79). Five percent of the sample had completed masters degrees and 95% held bachelors degrees. Half of the sample was conformed of preservice teachers and the remaining half of inservice regular education teachers. Percentages for other subject characteristic variables in inservice teachers are presented in Table 1.

Survey Instrument and Procedure

A modified version of the "Inclusion Attitudes and Beliefs" (Ellis, 1995) survey instrument was selected and adapted for use in the study. Fifteen items comprised the Benefits Scale and the

remaining fifteen items the Concerns Scale. The instrument was administered to two classes (one preservice and one inservice) of general education teachers enrolled in a postgraduate teacher university program before beginning a special education course included in that program. The Pre Benefits and Pre Concerns Scales exhibited fair internal consistency reliability (above .85).

The survey consisted of 30 questions. Each question assessed a teacher's belief about the benefits/concerns of inclusion. Each item was rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items were totaled to generate a composite score for each Subscale and for the Total Scale (60 + B - C). A high score (over 60) indicated more benefits or concerns toward inclusion. The instrument also included a section with 3 open-ended questions to add additional comments related to inclusion.

RESULTS

1. What are the beliefs of Spanish regular classroom teachers toward inclusion?.

The results are reported in Table 2 and Table 3 for benefits and concerns, respectively. In reviewing statements associated with benefits, 12% of the respondents had the opinion that special education should provide education for disabled (and nondisabled) only in the regular classrooms. This response indicates that regular education teachers, in a 71 percent, prefer sending students with special needs to special education classrooms rather than having special education teachers deliver services in the regular classroom. Sixty-two percent of the respondents felt that students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms will benefit socially. Only 20 percent of the respondents thought that children with disabilities do not learn enough meaningful information in special education. Sixty percent of the respondents agreed that teachers need technical expertise to ensure children with disabilities are successfully learning. According to 88% of the respondents, students with disabilities would have a better chance to success if strategies developed by special education were commonly used in the regular classroom. Only

18% of the respondents indicated that solo experts teachers should teach in inclusive classrooms. In reviewing statements associated with student performance, 32% of the respondents stated that special students performed better on average in regular classrooms and a 40% had the opposite opinion. Finally, 87% of the respondents felt that inclusion is a basic right of students and that teachers should be prepared to teach all students in the regular classroom.

Overall, most of the general education teachers agreed that inclusion is a right of students and a primary responsibility for teachers, and that some degree of inclusion could provide some benefits (academic and social) to the student with disabilities. However, only a minority of teachers agreed that general classroom was the best environment for students with special needs when compared with special education (items 1 and 3).

Regular classroom teachers were also asked about concerns regarding inclusion. One of the main concerns for 46 percent of the respondents was that eliminating special education placements will deprive many students an appropriate education. More specifically, respondents believed (89 percent) that children with disabilities do not receive sufficiently intensive instruction in regular classrooms because teachers can not attend to their needs, and that consequently maintaining a continuum of placements is a sensible solution for 83 percent of the respondents. Directly related to these statements were the opinions of those respondents who maintain that nothing is in place to make the regular classroom an inclusive environment (75% of the respondents), or that the resource room represents a good chance to work one-to-one (87% of agreements). However, to the question of whether or not mainstreaming/inclusion is ineffective, a majority of teachers (86 percent) disagreed. Overall, a great amount of teachers agreed that students with disabilities could create special classroom problems for them. This is the reason why regular classroom teachers agreed to maintain diverse placement options.

Total Scale and Subscales composite scores for the whole group of teachers and for subgroups (preservice and inservice teachers) are reported in Table 4. Considering that the mid point in the scales is 60, these results are indicative that Spanish teachers do not have positive perceptions of inclusion. Although they perceived more benefits (mean of 52.11, SD = 6.48) than concerns (mean of 40.79, SD = 6.31), taking into account the total score of the scale (mean of 70.77, SD = 9.73) we can only talk of acceptance more than of positive beliefs and perceptions.

2. Do Spanish teachers' beliefs (benefits and concerns toward inclusion) differ as a function of school experience?.

Once executed t tests for independent samples on the composite scores of the Benefits Subscale, the Concerns Subscale, and the Total Scale, data were indicative that Spanish preservice and inservice teachers did not differ significantly on their opinions of benefits ($t = -.1.96$, $p = .05$) and concerns ($t = -.1.57$, $p = .12$) toward inclusion. Total scores in the Scale reflected no significant differences between preservice and inservice regular classroom teachers ($t = .08$, $p = .94$), however, further examination of results indicated the following trend: Inservice teachers perceived more benefits (53.49 vs 50.73) and also more concerns (41.88 vs 39.71) in regarding inclusion that preservice teachers, but these differences are not statistically significant.

CONCLUSIONS AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Spanish teachers should model a positive attitude toward inclusion. Results indicated that Spanish regular classroom teachers' beliefs toward inclusion divided into two major areas:

(1) Positive beliefs in accepting primary responsibility for included students, and recognition of positive effects of inclusion, particularly, on the social domain.

(2) Strong reservations about work load, skills necessary to teach diverse students, and fear of eliminating the continuum of placements.

These results come to confirm the trends identified in previous studies (Minke, Bear, Deemer, Griffin, 1996; Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1996) and represent a warn to the need of training and support for Spanish teachers. There should be continuous preservice and inservice education courses focusing on attitudes that enable all teachers to work effectively with students who may have special needs.

Future studies should assess the impact of university special education courses that offer adequate opportunities to explore teachers' beliefs and attitudes.

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Table 1
Additional Demographic Data on Inservice Teachers

Variable	N	%
Years of Teaching Experience		
0-3	6/41	14.6
4-8	6/41	14.6
9-15	13/41	31.8
+ 15	16/41	39.0
Grade Level Taught		
Kindergarten	11/41	26.8
Elementary	19/41	46.4
Secondary	11/41	26.8

Table 2
Survey of Spanish Teachers' Beliefs on Inclusion
Subscale of Benefits

	Desagree				Agree
1. Special educators should provide education for disabled (and nondisabled) only in regular classrooms	20%	51%	17%	11%	1%
2. The more time students spend in the general education program, the less socially isolated they are	1%	12%	24%	33%	29%
3. Children with disabilities do not learn enough meaningful information in special education	13%	37%	30%	14%	6%
4. In an inclusion classroom teacher needs technical expertise to teach children with disabilities	2%	16%	22%	37%	23%
5. Social education with non disabled peers is the appropriate education for students with disabilities	6%	23%	33%	26%	13%
6. Special education historically has served as general education's "dumping ground" for "unteachables"	0%	5%	34%	38%	23%
7. Special education placements are inherently unequal	0%	16%	59%	18%	7%
8. Students with disabilities would have a better chance to success in regular education classes if more of the strategies developed by special education were commonly used	2%	5%	5%	37%	51%
9. It is very important for children to have the opportunity to learn and grow within communities that represent the kind of world they will live in when they finish school	1%	2%	15%	30%	52%
10. Inclusion places the emphasis on improving instruction rather than classifying and placing students	1%	12%	22%	39%	26%
11. The problem of maintaining the "continuum of placements" is that it keeps politicians from making far-reaching changes they need to make	5%	24%	48%	16%	7%
12. Only expert teachers with years of experience should teach in inclusive classrooms	17%	43%	22%	17%	1%
13. Special students generally perform better on average in regular classrooms	7%	33%	28%	25%	7%
14. Inclusion is a basic right of students	0%	2%	11%	30%	57%
15. Teachers should be prepared to teach all students	0%	2%	11%	26%	61%

Table 3
Survey of Spanish Teachers' Beliefs on Inclusion
Subscale of Concerns

	Desagree			Agree	
1. Inclusion is an untested model advocated by persons with a liberal agenda	42%	42%	8%	5%	3%
2. Eliminating special education placements will deprive many students with disabilities an appropriate education	17%	37%	24%	15%	7%
3. Abolishing separate placements will force mainstream teachers to deal with children they heretofore had avoided	0%	7%	33%	45%	15%
4. The special education teacher is basically treated like an aid in the regular classroom	16%	51%	22%	10%	1%
5. Normal children can not possibly learn as much in inclusion classrooms where the teacher is constantly having to deal with learning and behavior problems	27%	45%	11%	15%	2%
6. Students who are pulled out for special instruction actually receive less direct instruction than their non-disabled peers	20%	61%	10%	19%	0%
7. Too often children with disabilities do not receive sufficiently intensive instruction in the regular classroom because teachers can not attend to their needs like they like to do	0%	11%	48%	33%	8%
8. We must maintain the alternative of moving kids to other places when that appears necessary in the judgment of teachers and parents	11%	28%	42%	9%	10%
9. Trying to force every body into the inclusion mold promises to be just as coercive as trying to force everybody into the mode of special class	7%	49%	26%	12%	6%
10. A continuum of placement options is sensible	0%	18%	60%	15%	7%
11. Children are dumped into classrooms in the name of inclusion, when in fact, nothing is in place to make that an inclusive environment	1%	24%	34%	27%	14%

Table 3 (continuation)
Survey of Spanish Teachers' Beliefs on Inclusion
Subscale of Concerns

	Desagree				Agree
12. We need different types of instruction for different kids	5%	42%	22%	24%	7%
13. It is not fair to the rest of the class when the teachers has to spend inordinate amounts of time and energy dealing with the behaviors of a couple of "included kids"	22%	32%	24%	18%	4%
14. The resource rooms give the resource teacher a chance to work one on one and to experiment with authentic ways of teaching	0%	13%	26%	33%	28%
15. Mainstreaming is ineffective	32%	54%	8%	6%	0%

Table 4
Spanish Teachers' Beliefs Toward Inclusion for the Whole Group and for Preservice and Inservice Teachers

Groups	N	M	SD	Range
Whole Group				
Benefits	82	52.11	6.48	38-66
Concerns	82	40.79	6.31	30-58
Total Scale	82	70.77	9.73	42-88
Preservice Teachers				
Benefits	41	50.73	5.48	38-62
Concerns	41	39.71	5.83	30-51
Total Scale	41	70.85	1.37	51-87
Inservice Teachers				
Benefits	41	53.49	7.16	39-66
Concerns	41	41.88	6.65	30-58
Total Scale	41	70.68	10.74	42-88